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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

USAF Declass/Release Instructions On File

29 December 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 300

SUBJECT: Introduction of IL-28 Aircraft into the Chinese Communist Air Force

1. The recent introduction of two air regiments of IL-28 jet light bombers into the Chinese Communist Air Force (CCAF) in Manchuria is a particularly significant development. For the first time since the outbreak of the Korean war, the Communists have the capability of making daytime strikes in sizeable force against UN forces in Korea, the adjoining Korean waters, and Japan.

2. Concerning this development, the DI/USAF, in a memorandum dated 17 December 1951, concludes:

At any time after the end of January 1953, the IL-28's could be committed, in conjunction with existing MIG-15 strength, in a campaign capable of inflicting heavy damage on UN installations in Korea. Such an operation would be most difficult to counter. If the Manchurian sanctuary continued to be respected during these attacks, UN loss of air superiority could result, and the position of UN forces in Korea would be placed in serious jeopardy.

The addition of these IL-28's to the CCAF gives the Communists in the Far East a more balanced Air Force with the capability of forcing the UN (and in effect the US) to choose between:

a. Continuing Korean operations under extremely adverse conditions imposed by a superior enemy air force; or

b. Initiating attacks on Communist air bases in Manchuria.

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3. The extant National Intelligence Estimate dealing with enemy air potential in Korea is NIE-55/1, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea" dated 30 July 1952. The section dealing with Communist air capabilities reads:

The Communists now possess the capability of seriously challenging the UN air effort in Northwest Korea as far south as the Chongchon River and of extending their air operations southward into UN held territory and adjacent waters.

The assignment of jet bombardment aircraft to the Korean area would greatly enhance these capabilities.

4. The Far East Staff of O/NE considers that the increased enemy air capability foreshadowed by this development does not alter our extant estimate to such a degree that a re-estimate of Communist capabilities and probable courses of action is required at this time. Only one air regiment of IL-28 aircraft is expected to become operational by the end of January. The only other air regiment now in Manchuria is not expected to become operational for an additional month or two. Moreover, it does not appear that these two units, when operational, could in themselves so enhance Communist air capabilities as to warrant an enemy decision to begin large-scale bombing of UN forces from Manchurian bases. The Communists must consider, on the basis of numerous US-UN pronouncements, that the commitment of Manchurian-based aircraft against UN forces in Korea would result in UN expansion of the Korean war through retaliation against these Manchurian bases. Although we believe it likely that the Communists over a period of time will build up a powerful IL-28 striking force, which would possess the capability of greatly changing the situation in Korea, we consider that such a development could hardly occur before late spring.

5. We recommend, therefore, that no special estimate be initiated at this time to deal with the presence of IL 28 aircraft in the Chinese Communist air force. NIE-55/1 is scheduled for revision in the early spring, at which time the increase in Chinese Communist air capabilities can be weighed together with other new factors in the Korean situation.

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